

Iron County Silver Mine Gears Up for Operation

By Bruce Lee
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ENTERPRISE, Iron County — The sleeping giant is awakening in the hills north of here.

Ranchers Exploration and Development has revitalized a silver mine nestled quietly under the hills. The structures, fans, pumps, conveyor belts and piles of rock don't completely hint at the fury of excitement above and below the surface.

"This is a very exciting time for all of us as we get closer to the day when we can process the ore into silver," said Mike Anderson, technical superintendent.

The mine is already operating and the mill, in its final stage of construction, is going through a shakedown before it begins to process the ore for the silver. It is expected to be in full operation in the near future, Anderson said.

The silver will eventually be taken from two major veins in the mine.

The upper vein, which is part of a large fault system, is approximately 2,000 feet long and 12 to 35 feet wide. This ore, about seven ounces per ton, isn't

as rich as the 20-ounce per ton ore found in the bottom vein, according to Tanara Harlow, chief mine geologist.

The estimated depth of the bottom vein and proposed tunnels to it is 600 feet. Recently a new area south of the bottom projection was discovered, expanding the life of the mine and further exciting those involved.

"Everything is happening so fast here that it's difficult to keep up," Anderson said.

Geologist Don Morrison said, "The job of the geologist, primarily with the help of our maps, is to get a feel for the right place to get samples. We supervise the first production activities obtained with the drill jumbo."

The drill jumbo is exactly that, a jumbo drill which bores one-half inch holes and brings out samples.

Ranchers Corp. began mining this operation 20 months ago, although attempts had been made as early as 1896. The mine most recently closed in 1965 when, as in all previous instances, the ground water rose too high.

"We knew about the water situation well in advance and we are handling it. We consider it not a problem, but a situation," said Anderson.

Five pumps exceeding 20,000 gallons per minute are pumping the water into canals going north and

south from the operation.

The pumps move the water to other areas in the valley and put the water back into the ground water table. Farmers downstream adjacent to the canals can take water out for their own use if they already have water rights.

The mill now has over 130,000 tons of rock and will soon begin processing 500 tons per day. Capacity within six months to a year is expected to be 750 tons, Anderson said.

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